Stranger Twins 1.5 by bgtbgtbgbgt

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Summary:

A look at the time between seasons one and two of Stranger Things.

Same universe as Stranger Twins where Mike and Richie are twins and there's established Reddie.

1. November '83

November

Eleven had disappeared into thin air less than a week ago. Neither Mike or Eddie had returned to school yet. Mike had been practically catatonic since returning home following the events at Hawkins High School. He had stiffly answered the agents' questions and had visited Will once he woke up, but since then had remained tucked into his bottom bunk mattress, responding only to his brother and sister with broken sentences.

Eddie, despite his desperate need to rejoin the world and regain some sense of normalcy to quell his shock, was kept home by his mother who insisted he stay under her observation until he was *well again*. By the second day of his house arrest Eddie was climbing out of his window and meeting Richie at the bottom of his driveway as soon as his mom's snores were heard from her room down the hallway.

"Chee," Eddie sighed, throwing himself towards Richie once he was close enough.

"Hi, baby," Richie smiled, feeling as relieved to be in Eddie's presence as Eddie looked to be in his. "I missed you."

"I missed you too, Rich," Eddie whispered into Richie's neck before pulling back and scrutinizing Richie's face. Eddie knew that things had to be rough at the Wheelers' house with his twin brother. "How's Mike?"

"Not good," Richie sighed, releasing Eddie before taking his hand and leading him down the road to the Wheelers' house. Richie dropped Eddie's hand as they passed by a conspicuous white van, clearly from Hawkins' Laboratory, raising both arms and waving his middle fingers at the men inside the truck while Eddie scowled at them. "Motherfuckers," Richie hissed as he felt anger bubble in his chest, dropping his arms and grabbing Eddie's hand once they turned the corner.

Richie had noticed the vans on his way to school this morning and

both Dustin and Lucas had confirmed that there were vans outside their houses as well.

“Rich,” Eddie soothed, grabbing Richie’s bicep with his free hand and staring up at him meaningfully.

“Right,” Richie sighed again. “Anyway… Mike’s not doing good. He’ll barely talk to me or Nancy, he won’t eat, and he won’t get out of bed. I’m really worried about him Eds. He wasn’t even this bad when Will first went missing.”

Eddie chewed on the inside of his cheek, watching Richie’s thumb brush back and forth across the back of his hand where their hands were clasped between them. He now understood why Richie had insisted Eddie come to the Wheelers’ house tonight when Eddie had called him this afternoon while Sonia was busy watching *The Young and the Restless*. Richie wasn’t going to be leaving Mike for a full night on his own any time soon.

An hour later Richie found himself leaning back against the wall the bunkbed was pressed up against, one of Mike’s pillows behind his back. Mike was sitting next to Richie, eyes blank and legs pulled up to his chest with one of Richie’s arms wrapped around his shoulder. Eddie sat on Richie’s other side, turned in towards his boyfriend with one hand curled in the back of Richie’s shirt and the other in the front of his shirt near Eddie’s head which was resting on Richie’s shoulder.

Karen had forgotten about Richie’s punishment of not being allowed to close his bedroom door at night with the chaos over the last couple of days, which Richie was thankful for. It also wasn’t that surprising as Karen rarely followed through with Richie’s punishments considering he was given new ones almost daily and she had a hard time keeping track of them all.

Eddie shifted, throwing a leg over one of Richie’s and curling further into his boyfriend as his breathing evened out, signalling that his was dropping off to sleep. Richie brought his free hand up and tangled his

fingers in Eddie's hair, playing with the soft curls as he leaned his head back against the wall staring into the blank space in front of him like his brother.

Richie found himself questioning when this had become a normal night for him, curled between his brother and his boyfriend, comforting the two most important people in his life as they grieved the loss of a friend.

'Fuck those fucking assholes!' Richie thought, face twisting with anger as he thought about the white vans that had been following him all day.

The nightly sleepovers in Mike's bed had continued for nearly two weeks, Mike slowly coming out of his shell and beginning to eat and sleep again. He had returned to school and was starting to talk again, much to Karen's relief.

Richie and Eddie had also started retreating to Richie's bunk once Mike fell asleep, this time to Eddie's relief as he was beginning to worry about how little sleep Richie had gotten the past few weeks.

Mike walked around school like a ghost, speaking only when spoken to and picking at his lunch silently while his friends joked and argued around him. Richie and Eddie had sat with Mike, Dustin, and Lucas for lunch the first few days Mike was back at school, but had soon retreated back to the Losers' Club in an attempt to escape Dustin and Lucas' Star Wars arguments.

The Losers had welcomed them back into the group with open arms, questioning their odd behaviour over the last couple of weeks, but accepting that it would take time for the two to open up about it after Richie snapped at Beverly at lunch one day.

"But seriously!" Beverly whined, throwing her hands up in exasperation. "Just tell us what the hell happened!"

"Beverly, could you fuck off?" Richie barked, glaring at the girl

across the table. “It’s none of your fucking business!”

“Rich, don’t,” Eddie whispered, grabbing Richie’s knee under the table. Richie took a deep breath, pressing his palms to his face as he tried to control his sudden anger.

“Bev,” Richie sighed, swallowing and looking up at Beverly with an apologetic look. Beverly was staring at Richie in shock, her face red and her eyes slightly watery. “I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have snapped at you like that… I’m just tired and stressed. Mike’s been a handful the past couple weeks.”

Eddie scooted down the bench until his thigh was pressed to Richie’s, leaning into the taller boy’s side and rubbing a hand up and down his back. Eddie grabbed Richie's arm with his free hand as he pressed a kiss into the side of Richie’s bicep.

“I can’t talk about it right now and I know that’s shitty of me, but I just can’t.”

“I-I-It’s okay Ruh-R-Richie,” Bill told his friend, giving him a reassuring smile while the others nodded in agreement. Richie smiled in return before looking towards Beverly who also nodded along.

2. December '83

December 23, 1983

“C’mon, Mikey! You gotta come!”

“No, Richie,” Mike retorted, not looking up from his Dungeons and Dragon binder where he was busy working on the next campaign. “I don’t *have* to come.”

“Mike, it’s a birthday party for *your* birthday! You gotta go to it!”

“Richie,” Mike sighed, putting down his pen and turning to look up at Richie who was hanging over the side of the railing that ran along Richie’s top bunk. “*Your* friend is throwing this party for *your* birthday. I just so happen to be the unlucky shmuck that has to share a birthdate with you. I’m not going to the party.”

“Mikey!” Richie groaned dramatically before pushing himself up from the bed and jumping down to the floor. “Bill’s parents are gone all weekend and Stan’s brother scored us a shit ton of booze. Now, as your older brother I’m making the executive decision for you. You’re coming to *our* birthday party which starts in half an hour, so put your fucking nerd book away and put something on that doesn’t look like mom knitted it for you.”

“Fuck you... *fine,*” Mike grumbled, pushing himself up from his desk to follow Richie’s instructions. "If it'll get you off my back for five seconds."

“Happy birthday to you too, little brother!” Richie grinned before leaving the room.

“Richie,” Mike groaned as they turned the corner onto Bill’s street. “I thought you said it was gonna be a small party!”

The two stood at the end of the street, pausing to stare at the Denborough house. The thumping music from the party could be heard from the end of the street and there were teenagers spilling out

of the front door and onto the front lawn, smoking and drinking.

“Way to fucking go, Big Bill,” Richie laughed, clapping a hand to Mike’s shoulder and pushing on it to get Mike moving forward again.

“I’m gonna go find Eddie,” Richie shouted into Mike’s ear once they were in the house.

“Wait, Richie-” Mike called, moving to grab his brother before he disappeared into the sea of teenagers but he was already gone. Mike sighed, turning in a circle and pushing himself up onto his toes as he searched for Dustin, Lucas, and Will. Richie had promised Mike all of his friends would be attending the party.

“Chee!” Eddie shrieked happily, throwing his arms around Richie from behind.

Richie turned in Eddie’s arms, smiling down at his clearly intoxicated boyfriend. Eddie grinned back up at Richie, snaking his arms around Richie’s neck as Richie clasped his hands behind Eddie’s back.

“Well, hello there, Spaghetti Man!” Richie cooed making Eddie giggle. Richie felt a warm happiness fill his chest as he took in Eddie’s flushed cheeks and tousled hair.

“Happy birthday!”

“Why, thank you my good sir,” Richie smiled, pecking Eddie’s nose and drawing another giggle from the smaller boy. “Say, you wouldn’t happen to know where an ol’ chap like me could find a nice strong bevy?”

“Sorry, Rich. I dunno where Bev went,” Eddie responded, frowning apologetically, causing Richie to throw his head back with laughter.

“No, Eds, I meant a drink. Ya know, like a beverage… bevy,” Richie explained, smiling fondly at Eddie.

“Oh!” Eddie’s face lit up with understanding. “Yeah, follow me!”

Richie felt his cheeks ache as his smile grew while Eddie ducked out of his embrace and began tugging Richie towards the Denboroughs’ kitchen.

Mike had been at the party for nearly an hour and had yet to find any of his friends.

“Richie!” Mike called when he spotted his brother in the kitchen during his third tour through the house. “Richie!”

“Huh?” Richie mumbled, pulling away from Eddie and looking around the room at the sound of his name.

“Richie!” Mike called again once he was close enough, grabbing Richie’s shoulder.

“Oh, hey Mikey,” Richie slurred, cheeks flushed and glasses slightly crooked. He was stood between Eddie’s thighs while Eddie was perched on the island in the middle of the kitchen where teenagers were messily mixing drinks and spilling liquid across the surface.

“Happy birthday, Mike!” Eddie exclaimed, holding onto Richie’s shoulders as he grinned at Mike.

“I wanna leave,” Mike deadpanned, staring at his brother.

“What?”

“I said, I wanna fucking leave, Richie,” Mike repeated, frown deepening.

“Mikey, we just got here!” Richie laughed, shaking his head and turning back to Eddie.

“No, Richie,” Mike continued, grabbing his brother’s shoulder and turning him back around, shoving him slightly against the counter. “I wanna fucking leave, right now.”

“Mike,” Richie sighed, licking his lips as he tried to sort out his

thoughts which were jumbling in his tipsy brain.

“Listen, I’m leaving whether you’re coming with me or not,” Mike interrupted. “Goodbye.”

“Mike! Wait, Mike!” Richie called, watching his brother’s retreating form with a frown. “Ugh,” Richie groaned when he lost sight of Mike, turning and burrowing his face into Eddie’s chest. Eddie hugged the back of Richie’s neck, leaning down to press a kiss to the top of Richie’s head. “Should I go after him?”

“I dunno, Rich,” Eddie mumbled. “Maybe he just needs some time to himself.”

“I shouldn’t have forced him to come,” Richie muttered, pulling away from Eddie’s chest and resting his hands flat on Eddie’s thighs. “I’m such a fucking asshole…”

“No, Richie,” Eddie rushed out. “No, you’re not an asshole. It’s your birthday, you just wanted to celebrate it with your brother.”

“But I knew he would hate it. I knew he wouldn’t want a party…”

Eddie shrugged, staring down at Richie with a pitying smile, unsure of how to respond.

Mike crept into the house through the basement entrance, not wanting to alert his parents to his return. They were under the impression that the twins were having a movie marathon and a sleepover at the Denboroughs’ and while Mike was pissed with his brother, he didn’t feel like ratting him out.

As Mike crept through the basement towards the stairs the form of Eleven’s fort caught his eye. He swallowed, turning to stare at the mass of pillows and blankets. His mom had nagged him and his brother to tidy the space up whenever she was down there doing laundry, but Mike hadn’t been able to tear down the fort and Richie never would have forced him to.

Mike trudged towards the fort, collapsing in a heap inside of it and grabbing the radio which he had left in there since Eleven had disappeared. He turned the radio on, listening to the tinny static for a second before pressing down on the button on the side of it.

“El? El, are you there?” Mike called out as he had for the last 37 days. “El, do you copy? Over.”

Mike released the button briefly, listening to the static.

“El,” Mike continued, laying down on his side and pulling a blanket over himself as he spoke. “I miss you... It’s been 37 days and I miss you more than ever before, if that’s possible.”

Mike released the button again, rolling onto his back and staring up at the pattern of the blanket making up the roof of the fort.

“It’s my sixteenth birthday today, El,” Mike continued. “I wish you were here… Richie’s friends threw a big party for us… I think it was just a reason for them to get drunk to be honest… I really hated it. Might have been better if you were there though…”

Mike fell silent, wiping furiously at the tears that had begun to gather in the corners of his eyes.

“I can’t do it, El. I can’t just act like everything is fine and normal,” Mike hiccupped. “Because it’s not fine and it’s not normal. You’re gone and I can’t find you and I miss you so much, El!”

Mike rested the radio on his chest, the antenna tickling his neck as it moved up and down with the movement of his chest.

“It’s not fair… Richie has Eddie, he’s always had Eddie… Even when they weren’t dating they were still Richie-and-Eddie… It’s not fair, El. It’s not fair…”

Mike drifted off, the tears exhausting him as he continued to mumble sadly into the radio.

3. February '84

February

“Happy Valentine’s Day, my love,” Richie cooed, leaning down to peck a kiss to Eddie’s waiting lips as the smaller boy tried to hold back a grin.

“Hi, Rich,” Eddie murmured into the kiss, wrapping his arms around the taller boy’s neck. “Happy Valentine’s.”

“Here,” Richie grinned, twisting to pull a slightly crushed heart-shaped box of chocolates from his backpack.

“Thanks, Chee,” Eddie smiled, cheeks slightly pink, as he accepted the gift before pushing himself up onto his toes and pressing a kiss to Richie’s cheek. “I thought we agreed no gifts, though. Just some horror movies and greasy pizza after school.”

“It’s only chocolate, Eds,” Richie shrugged, grinning as he turned to hop on his bike.

“I know, but-” Eddie began to argue opening the box to peek at the chocolates inside. “RICHIE!” Eddie shrieked with laughter, causing his boyfriend to crack up.

“Sorry, couldn’t help myself,” Richie laughed, circling Eddie on his bike as Eddie spluttered at the half-empty plastic tray of chocolates. “I left your favourites for you though.”

“How thoughtful of you, babe,” Eddie joked, rolling his eyes and turning his head side to side to keep his eyes on his boyfriend who was still pedalling in circles around him.

“I already told you, I don’t want to buy a stupid candy-gram!”

Richie and Eddie turned to stare down the hallway where Mike was scowling at a cheerleader who was selling Valentine's Day candy-grams to raise money for the student council. Eddie winced, turning to look up at Richie with a sympathetic expression.

"He's not doin' too hot, huh?"

"My mom made heart shaped pancakes for breakfast today because she's ridiculous," Richie laughed, grabbing a textbook and slamming his locker shut. "And Mike spent a solid five minutes violently stabbing his with a fork. *Then*, Nancy mentioned her date with Steve tonight which set him off on a rant about how the whole holiday is a grossly commercialized scam."

"Well, he's not wrong," Eddie laughed, as they walked down the hall towards their history class.

"I guess..."

"Did you invite him?"

"Spaghetti," Richie whined, pouting down at his boyfriend as they walked.

"Richie, I think it'd be a nice gesture. I mean, he's never been so against Valentine's Day before. He's clearly upset that he's alone this year," Eddie chided.

"Dude's been grumpy as shit, though. He's gonna ruin it!" Richie continued to whine. "Why can't he third-wheel someone else's date?"

"Rich," Eddie sighed, wrapping a hand around Richie's wrist and pulling him to a stop right outside their classroom. "He's your twin brother and he's hurting."

"I know," Richie sighed, rolling his eyes. "You're right."

"Always am," Eddie joked, reaching up to pinch Richie's cheek teasingly before turning on his heel and entering their classroom.

"So, Eddie and I are gonna order pizza and watch The Shining

tonight if you wanna join," Richie told his brother, leaning over the railing of his bunk and watching the back of his brother's head as he worked on homework at his desk.

"Romantic," Mike snorted sarcastically. "No thanks, I have an assignment to work on."

"Mikey, you can take a break," Richie laughed, rolling his eyes at his brother. "Spending a couple of hours watching a movie and pigging out isn't gonna bring about your academic demise."

Mike hummed distractedly as though he weren't paying attention to Richie. In reality, however, Mike was hanging on Richie's every word and thinking bitterly about how he was alone on Valentine's Day for the sixteenth year in a row.

"Eddie *really* wants you to hang out with us," Richie continued, jumping down from his bunk and leaning against his dresser, still watching Mike. "No idea why, but he seems to actually like hanging out with you."

"*Because*," Mike drawled, not looking up from his notebook. "Eddie is smart and kind and way out of your league."

"You're not wrong," Richie grinned, thinking about his boyfriend.

"Fine, I'll come watch for a bit," Mike groaned, turning to look at his brother. "But I'm not pitching in for the pizza."

"Neither am I," Richie grinned, pulling a crumpled twenty from his back pocket. "This Valentine's Day is brought to you by our sponsor Ted Wheeler," Richie began in a showy television announcer-style voice. "Ted Wheeler, leaving his wallet lying around while he naps in his recliner like the useless, waste of space that he is for sixteen years and counting. Thanks, Ted!"

"You're such a thief," Mike laughed, shaking his head and turning back to his homework.

"I consider it an advance payment for the years of therapy I'm sure all four of us will need in the future as a result of his absentee parenting style," Richie joked before heading down the hall to call

the local pizzeria.

“Hey, Mike!” Eddie grinned, knees curled beneath him as he rested against Richie. “I’m so glad you agreed to hang out with us!”

“Hi, Eddie,” Mike responded, face pulling into a tight, false smile.

“Can I eat now?” Richie whined, staring hungrily at the pizza boxes on the coffee table in front of them.

“You’re so impatient, Richie,” Eddie sighed, frowning up at his boyfriend. “It’s rude to start eating-”

“It’s okay, Eddie,” Mike interrupted, settling onto the couch next to Richie. “I’ve shared a room with him for, sixteen years. I think I’m *almost* used to his complete disregard for those around him.”

Richie flashed a cheesy smile before leaning over and popping open the cardboard pizza boxes in front of him. He quickly tore off a piece of one of the pizzas, shoving it in his mouth and chewing on the dangling triangle as he piled three more slices onto a plate for himself.

“Hawaiian or pepperoni?” Richie garbled through the slice of pizza in his mouth, looking at his brother as he placed a single slice of pepperoni on a plate for Eddie.

“Pepperoni,” Mike grimaced, watching his brother. “Why are you dating him, again?”

“I honestly have no idea,” Eddie frowned, holding his plate in his lap and watching as Richie splattered grease and cheese across the table as he laughed around the food in his mouth, sauce smudging his chin. “Richie, honestly,” Eddie groaned, leaning forward and putting his plate on the table before grabbing a napkin. “C’mere,” he laughed, grabbing a hold of Richie’s chin before wiping the food from his boyfriend’s face.

“Thanks, S’ghetti-o,” Richie grinned, smacking a greasy kiss to

Eddie's cheek before shoving another slice of pizza into his mouth.

"Richie!" Eddie shrieked, rubbing at his cheek with a new napkin. "You're such an asshole," Eddie grumbled, grabbing his food and settling back into the couch to watch the movie, leaning into Richie despite the unappetizing sounds he was making as he chewed his food.

"I always forget how much I love that movie!" Mike exclaims as the credits begin to roll. "What other movies did you guys get?"

"Oh, um," Eddie started, looking up at Richie embarrassedly. "We actually only got one-"

"Mike, I'm gonna be honest with you here," Richie interrupted. "We were planning on banging after the movie."

"Richie!"

"What? We were!"

Eddie glared up at him, cheeks flushed with embarrassment. The three boys had been entrusted with Holly's care for the evening since Nancy was on a date with Steve and Ted had decided to put in a little effort and take his wife out for dinner and a movie. Eddie had put Holly to bed right before their pizza arrived and they had about an hour until Karen and Ted would be back.

"We can always just watch something on TV," Eddie suggested, pushing himself up onto his knees.

"No, no, no," Mike shook his head, standing. "It's Valentine's… I've already ruined Richie's night enough. I'll be in the basement, I guess."

"Tight!" Richie grinned, winking at his brother who nodded and turned to retreat to the basement.

"I can't believe you!"

"Ow, what?" Richie groaned, rubbing his arm where Eddie had just

smacked him.

“Oh, I dunno,” Eddie drawled sarcastically, squinting up at Richie. “You just pushed away your lonely, heartbroken brother on Valentine’s Day and told him we’re gonna go fuck in his bedroom. But you didn’t do anything wrong, Richie!”

“Listen, Mike’ll be fine,” Richie reassured, holding Eddie’s shoulders. “Now, are you gonna let me fuck you or is it just me and my hand tonight?”

“Muah, love you,” Eddie smiled, pushing himself up from Richie’s chest.

“No, stay with me,” Richie whined, grabbing Eddie’s hips.

“No, Richie,” Eddie responded, fixing his boyfriend with a serious gaze. “Your mom is letting me stay over tonight and I’m not gonna fuck it up by breaking her only sleepover rule. I’ll be right down the hall.”

“Fine,” Richie groaned, releasing Eddie and resting his chin on the railing of his top bunk as he watched Eddie descend the ladder. “But don’t blame me if I sleep walk into the spare room in the middle of the night. My body demands to be near my Spaghetti Head!”

“Don’t you dare, Rich,” Eddie laughed.

Richie descended the stairs into the basement quietly, not wanting to wake Mike if he had fallen asleep down there.

“Mike?” Richie whispered when he found the couch empty and the room silent. “Mike? Oh!”

Richie turned to find Mike curled in Eleven’s fort, lips pressed to his Supercom as he mumbled into it with tears rolling down his cheeks. Richie gulped, listening as Mike quietly called for Eleven.

“Oh, Mikey,” Richie sighed sadly, kneeling in front of the fort and startling his brother. Mike sat up, throwing down the radio and wiping harshly at his cheeks.

“M’fine,” Mike croaked, not making eye contact with his brother.

“Okay,” Richie nodded, grabbing his brother’s shoulder. “Bed, then?”

Mike looked up at his brother, surprised at the fact that Richie wasn’t teasing him or pushing him to talk about what Richie had caught him doing.

“Yeah,” Mike nodded, ducking his head and picking at a loose thread in the hem of his pant leg.

“C’mon, little brother,” Richie smiled softly, pushing himself up to his feet and reaching a hand out to his brother.

4. Summer '84

Summer

The summer between Sophomore and Junior year was a summer of new beginnings for the Losers' Club and the party.

It was the first summer all of the teenagers had jobs. Eddie had finally convinced the local mechanic Vince to hire him at his auto shop despite Eddie's mother's tears and blatant hatred for the inky black grease stains covering Eddie's work clothes. Richie had been working part-time weekend shifts at Palace Arcade for months, but had been bumped up to full-time for the summer. Joyce had helped both Will and Mike get jobs at Radio Shack thanks to her new boyfriend Bob, who just so happened to be the manager. Lucas was still mowing lawns, while Dustin spent his days volunteering in the Hawkins General Hospital lab, preparing microscope slides and emptying sharps bins. The other Mike was still working on the farm with his dad, while Bill and Stan had both gotten jobs bagging groceries at the market. Bev was hired as a cashier at the same market and Ben had begun working in the library.

Much to Eddie's dismay, it appeared as though the Losers' Club would be spending their first taste of financial freedom, after each receiving their first paycheck of the summer, on some cheap beer and skunk-y marijuana.

"C'mon Eds," Richie called from the tree he was leaning against at the quarry, sitting in a circle with the rest of the Losers' Club, passing a clumsily rolled joint.

"Absolutely not, Richard," Eddie scowled, standing a few yards away with his arms crossed over his chest. Eddie was incredibly annoyed that the entire group had agreed this was a good idea. "First of all, disgusting! We don't even know where Hockstetter got that shit, I'm definitely not ingesting it! Second of all, I have fucking asthma-"

"Okay, okay," Richie groaned, trying to cut Eddie's rant short. "We're done smoking, you can come over now."

Eddie peered over at the group, eyeing each individual before slowly trudging over and settling next to Richie, arms still crossed tightly over his chest.

“Don’t be mad at me, Spaghetti,” Richie whined, catching Eddie in a headlock and pressing kisses to Eddie’s head.

“Get off of me!” Eddie shrieked, wriggling away from his boyfriend with his nose turned up in disgust. “You fucking stink!”

“Hurtful!” Richie joked.

“If my mother smells that shit on me you know I won’t be allowed to leave the house until I’m forty-five!”

“Richard, are you kidding me!” Karen screamed, hands on her hips as her face turned red with anger.

“Mom-”

“Nuh uh,” Karen interrupted. “You don’t get to speak right now.”

“But-”

“I just came home to find you, high as a kite and rifling through my kitchen cupboards and stuffing your face while you were supposed to be watching Holly.”

“Mom, Eddie’s-”

“No, Richard!” Karen roared, ignoring the sounds of Holly crying and Eddie shushing her from the other room. “I don’t care that Eddie was here to make sure Holly was okay. That’s not his job, I asked *you* to watch *your* sister. I can’t believe you, I’m so disappointed!”

“Mom, I’m sorry-”

“You got high while you were supposed to be watching your *baby sister*,” Karen repeated, causing Richie to hang his head in shame. “I can’t believe you. How am I ever supposed to trust you with Holly again?”

“Mom, it was one time! I’m sorry, it won’t happen again,” Richie rushed, staring at his mother with sorrow. “It was a stupid mistake. I’m sorry, I know I could have put Hol-Holly in dan-danger.”

Eddie listened from the living room, waving a toy in Holly’s face in an attempt to distract her from the argument in the other room. Eddie was just as furious with his boyfriend for what he had done. Richie had asked him to come babysit Holly with him for the day as they both had the day off. Eddie hadn’t expected, however, for Richie to smoke a ‘quick j’, as he called it, on the back porch while Eddie made them lunch.

Eddie had wanted to storm into the kitchen and join Karen in her yelling, releasing the past month of anger he had been pushing down as Richie continued to smoke almost daily. When Eddie heard Richie’s voice start to wobble as he began hiccupping, his anger dissipated. He knew Richie was crying right now and was trying his hardest not to run into the kitchen and comfort his boyfriend.

“I think Eddie should leave and you should go to your room,” Karen spoke, voice hard and unwaivering.

“Okay, I’m going. Tell Eddie I said bye,” Eddie heard Richie say softly.

Eddie pushed himself up from the ground, scooping Holly up in his arms and storming into the kitchen.

“You weren’t gonna say goodbye to me?"

“Eds,” Richie whimpered, face crumpling as he took in Eddie’s flushed face with Holly on his hip, her small hands curled in Eddie’s shirt.

“Eddie, thank you for taking care of Holly,” Karen cut in, taking Holly from his arms. Eddie nodded stiffly, eyes still watching Richie. “Clearly, my son isn’t anywhere near mature enough to watch a toddler for a few hours.”

“Mom, I’m sorry,” Richie repeated, eyes pleading and desperate for acceptance of his apology. “I made a mistake.”

“Well, I sure hope it was worth it, Richard,” Karen continued. “You’re not allowed to take Holly out or stay home alone with her anymore.”

“Mom!” Richie cried, a couple of tears escaping his eyes. Richie may have been a sixteen-year-old boy, but he absolutely adored his baby sister. She was the first person he took driving when he got his license, taking her to pick up Eddie and then to go and get ice cream. He loved spending time with Holly.

Eddie cautiously approached his boyfriend, crowding him against one of the kitchen walls and wrapping his arms around Richie’s neck, pulling him down so he could speak quietly to him.

“Rich,” Eddie whispered, stroking Richie’s curls back.

“Eds, I’m sorry,” Richie gushed, clutching the front of Eddie’s shirt. “I’m so fucking sorry, baby. I’m sorry.”

“Shh,” Eddie hissed, wiping the tears falling from his boyfriend’s eyes. “I know, I know you are. Just calm down, okay?”

Richie nodded, swallowing down some of his tears.

“Okay, I’m gonna go home, no shh shh shh, stop,” Eddie hushed him, halting Richie’s protests of his departure. “I’m gonna go home. You need to calm down. We’ll talk about this tomorrow, okay?”

Richie nodded hesitantly.

“Okay, I love you,” Eddie reminded him seriously, pecking Richie's lips and smiling softly when Richie echoed his sentiments. “Bye, Karen. Bye, Holly Doll!”

Although Richie had stopped smoking in the house or when there was a chance that he would be anywhere near his mother or sister, marijuana became a permanent fixture of Losers’ summer. Stan and Ben had decided they didn’t particularly enjoy their first experience and had bowed out of the rest of the Losers’ new favourite pastime with Eddie.

Bill and Richie were by far the heaviest smokers out of the group, sharing a couple joints whenever they had an evening off and could make it to the quarry.

Eddie absolutely hated his boyfriend's newest habit, but it seemed that for the first time ever in his eleven years of being best friends with Richie, Richie didn't care what Eddie thought. It absolutely terrified Eddie. Sure, he had been repentant about smoking around Holly, but that was just because it affected Holly. He wasn't actually sorry for smoking pot.

"I just don't understand why you always have to be high," Eddie cried, pouting as he peered into Richie's red eyes.

"Eddie-"

"We *barely* have time to spend together as it is," Eddie continued to argue. "And now anytime I do get to see you, you're fucking high and you reek."

"Babe," Richie sighed, blinking as he tried to collect his thoughts. "It just… makes everything better."

"Fuck you," Eddie spat, face shocked by Richie's words. "Because your life is so awful when your sober?"

"No, no, no," Richie hurried, shaking his head with a panicked look on his face. "That's not what I mean! That's not what I mean! Just… like, everything is always so fast for me, y'know… and pot just kinda slows it all down. Makes things feel calmer."

Eddie chewed his bottom lip, holding eye contact with the taller boy.

"Rich," Eddie sighed, grabbing Richie's arm and pulling him to sit down on the couch in the Wheelers' basement. "I was doing some reading at the library and I came across this Attention-Deficit Disorder thing. It's been around forever but the name is kinda new… I think maybe-"

"Eddie, stop," Richie interrupted in a whisper, taking Eddie's face in his hands. "Stop reading all those medical journals. Stop diagnosing yourself. Stop diagnosing me. Just stop."

Eddie swallowed, looking down at his lap as Richie continued to hold his face.

"Sorry," Eddie whispered.

"C'mere," Richie sighed, pulling Eddie into his lap and rocking his boyfriend ever so slightly as the smaller boy sat silently in his arms. "It's okay. It's not your fault, you're just worried. It's what you do… But sometimes you worry too much and it hurts you. So, *please* don't go reading those nerdy medical books. Don't go looking for something wrong with yourself or me or anyone. Don't be my mom or my doctor or my fucking school counsellor. Just be my boyfriend. Just be my Eddie Spaghetti. *Please.*"

"I hate you," Eddie choked out, voice sounding watery through his laughter.

"Fucking, hate you too," Richie joked. "I hate you so fucking much, babe."

"This is ridiculous!" Eddie exclaimed, hands on his hips as he watched Richie teach his brother how to roll a joint. There was barely a month left of summer vacation and he was currently sat with his boyfriend and his boyfriend's twin brother, lounging in a field by the quarry.

"Calm down, Eds," Richie laughed, running the tip of his tongue along the edge of the joint paper, using the moistened end to seal the rolled joint.

"Calm down, Eds? Calm down, Eds?!" Eddie shrieked, pushing himself off the ground to pace back and forth in front of the twins. "He's your *little* brother and you're introducing him to pot, Richie!"

"We're the same age, Eds," Richie laughed, shaking his head and lighting the end of the joint.

"Oh, so *now* you guys are the same age? Really, Richie?"

"Eddie, baby," Richie spoke, voice distorted and face contorted as he spoke while holding the smoke he had just inhaled in his lungs.

“Please take a chill pill.”

“Honestly, Richie,” Eddie huffed, halting his pacing and glaring down at his boyfriend. “Fuck you.”

Eddie turned on his heel, walking towards the pile of bikes a few yards away and grabbing his own scuffed up green bike.

“Wait, Spaghetti,” Richie called, pushing himself up and jogging towards Eddie who was now sat on his bike, a foot planted firmly on the ground on either side of his bike. “Where are you going?”

“Home,” Eddie responded, glaring daggers into Richie’s eyes.

“Eddie, I’m sorry,” Richie sighed, placing a hand on top of one of Eddie’s. Eddie lifted his hand off the bike’s handle bars, shaking Richie off briefly and causing Richie to make a quiet, hurt noise.

“You’re not sorry,” Eddie seethed. “If you were sorry, you would stop.”

“Okay, maybe I’m not sorry for the pot,” Richie answered, rubbing the back of his neck nervously. “But I am sorry for upsetting you. For hurting you.”

“Then stop hurting me... Sorry, but I can’t be around you right now,” Eddie whispered, staring down at his hands. His words had even surprised himself. There had never been a time in his life that he could remember when he didn’t want to be around Richie. “I gotta go.”

“Okay,” Richie nodded, a resigned look on his face.

“See ya later?” Eddie asked, looking up and squinting one eye against the sun which was setting behind Richie. Richie nodded, staring down at his feet. “Okay… I love you.”

“Love you too, S’ghetti,” Richie responded in a quiet voice, staring at his feet. Eddie clicked his tongue, amused by the bashful demeanor Richie was displaying.

“C’mere, you idiot,” Eddie whispered, grabbing Richie’s chin and

pressing a hard, closed mouth kiss to Richie's lips. "Bye."

"See ya."

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Richie flopped down over his calculus textbook dramatically, moaning as though he was in physical pain.

“C’mon, Rich,” Eddie laughed, not looking up as he continued to furiously scribble down the answer to the calculus question he was working on. “We’ve got ten more.”

“Eds, sweetie, sugar plum, baby,” Richie recited, voice sickly sweet as he reached across the table to grab Eddie’s left hand. “My love, my darling, my one and only Spagh-”

“Are you about done, Rich?” Eddie huffed out a laugh, blowing a piece of hair from his face as he looked up at his boyfriend, sitting across the table in the Wheelers’ dining room.

“Almost,” Richie quipped, a playful grin gracing his lips. “My one and only Spaghetti Monster, my sex machine-“

“Richie!”

“My bear, my little snuggle bug,” Richie continued, grinning as Eddie’s face turned red. “We’ve been studying for two and a half hours. Can we please take a break?”

“Richie,” Eddie sighed, dropping his pencil and fixing Richie with a serious stare.

The past few weeks had been a blur. Richie had gone to Eddie the night after he had first introduced Mike to pot. He had been a blubbering mess, all apologies and big eyes as he begged Eddie not to break up with him.

Eddie was completely blindsided, he had never even considered breaking up with Richie.

“Chee, baby,” Eddie sighed, pulling Richie down onto his bed and letting

the taller boy rest his head in Eddie' s lap. "I' m not gonna break up with you just because we've had a rough month or so …"

"You're not? " Richie sniffled, looking up at Eddie sadly.

"No, baby, " Eddie smiled softly, pushing Richie's glasses up onto his forehead before wiping Richie's teary eyes with his thumb. " I love you so fucking much Richie. We've been together … well, our whole lives really…"

Richie's lips quirked sadly and he sniffled again.

"I'm not gonna give up on you," Eddie told him, holding Richie's cheeks in each of his hands while Richie brought his hands up to cover Eddie's. "I love you way too much to just give up on you."

"Thanks," Richie queaked, swallowing and looking up at Eddie's ceiling to avoid his boyfriend's gaze. "I just thought…You looked SO sad, Eds. So sad… And it was all because of me."

Richie began to tear up again, causing Eddie to shush him and pull his boyfriend to his chest.

"I'm gonna stop," Richie whispered. "I love you, Eds. I'm gonna stop, I promise."

"Okay," Eddie nodded, still holding Richie tightly and rocking them slightly.

Since that night Richie had cut back significantly, only ever smoking or drinking when they attended a party, which Eddie could deal with. He was more than okay with that.

Mike, however, had spiralled in the opposite direction of his brother. He had begun smoking with Bill, which surprised everyone but it was the only place Mike knew of to get weed.

Mike's moods had begun to turn especially sour, causing him to lash out at his parents and siblings. On the rare occasion that he actually

showed up for dinner he would sit and silently pick at the food, glaring down at his plate with his hair hanging over his face. The dinners always seemed to end in a fight between Mike and another member of the Wheeler family, causing the dinner to devolve into yelling and name calling until Mike stormed out of the house.

Mike's behaviour translated to school in much the same way. He was skipping classes on a regular basis and mouthing off to teachers whenever he did show up.

Everyone was worried about Mike, especially Richie who also had a heavy dash of guilt added to his worry. He was convinced this was his fault. He had encouraged Mike to smoke pot and now Mike's life was ruined forever.

Eddie had tried to reassure Richie that Mike's behaviour wasn't entirely Richie's fault. He couldn't be blamed for the way Mike was acting, Mike was sixteen and had to take responsibility for his own actions. Eddie also thought Richie was being a tad ridiculous in thinking that Mike's life was now ruined, but he kept that to himself and silently let Richie, and occasionally Karen, vent their frustrations to him.

"We have a Calc test next week and I'm still struggling with The Chain Rule," Eddie reminded him. "I need an A, you know that."

"You're gonna get an A," Richie reassured him. Eddie glared back at his boyfriend in response.

"Fine," Richie groaned, releasing Eddie's hand and picking his pencil up to continue working on math problems.

On top of cutting back on illicit substances, Eddie had also gotten Richie to begin working harder at school. Eddie had collected information booklets on a variety of universities and colleges over the summer and his life had become all consumed with the idea of studying mechanical engineering at the University of California in Los Angeles.

Eddie shared his new obsession with Richie in August, and although they were only entering into their Junior year Richie had been so

excited that Eddie wanted to go to school in California that he had indulged Eddie's ideas. The small boy created study schedules for the two of them and began reviewing their course curriculum the week before school even started. Richie thought it was completely ridiculous, but he also loved the idea of moving to California with Eddie in a couple years.

And that dream was the reason that Richie now found himself working a week ahead of their Junior Calculus class' syllabus at Eddie's insistence.

"Okay, boys," Karen called from the kitchen. "Time to clear up, dinner's almost ready. Start setting the table."

"Why can't Nancy do it?" Richie groaned as he slammed his textbook shut.

"Because I asked you two, Richard," Karen responded in an even tone, used to the argument by now.

"Stop whining," Eddie laughed, grabbing Richie's chin and pecking him on the lips before shoving his books into his bag.

"I'm not whining," Richie whined, pouting at Eddie who was now taking his bag to the front door.

"Whining," Eddie pointed out with a laugh as he passed Richie on his way back from the door as he headed for the kitchen to begin grabbing plates.